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ABSTRACT

A study was done to explore the role of senior and middle managers in British Further Education (FE) about a year after these institutions had been incorporated and gained their independence from local funding authorities. The research examined administrator attitudes at a large broadly based urban college providing a wide range of educational and training opportunities and at a smaller, more rural college with a typical range of courses and in the process of developing a center for performing arts. Comparison of the views of senior and middle managers revealed a mixture of different perceptions, opinions and attitudes as well as different institutional responses to change under the new conditions. A critical area of change identified was that senior managers are now responsible for understanding and shaping the organizational culture. The analysis also found that institutions are being challenged to become "thinking organizations" where innovation is supported. Further the data suggest that the challenge may be to release managers from functionalism, to open up the strategic dimension of each manager's work and encourage new ideas about the future. A diagram of the McKinsey framework used in the data analysis is included. (Contains 28 references.) (JB)

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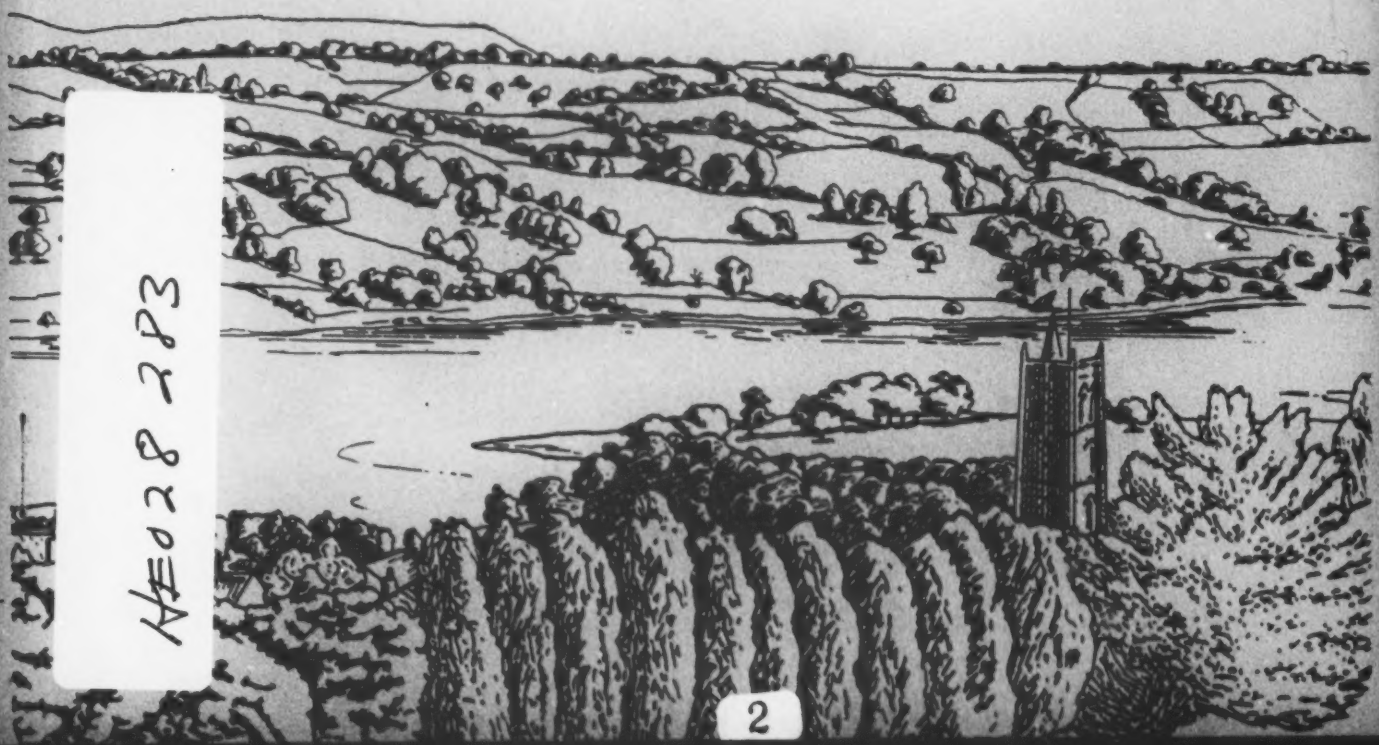

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A focus for human resource management in further education

Andrew Betts

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Introduction

This paper has been developed from a recent research project and is concerned with the nature and process of change in the management of further education. It is based on active research undertaken during the early part of 1994, almost a year after colleges gained independence from local authorities. During that time many things have happened within the further education sector. There was an opportunity to reflect on developments since incorporation and consider whether this major change had an impact on the way colleges were managed. What were managers thinking about their work? How did they go about their jobs and what was important to them now?

The broad aim of the research was to consider the role of senior and middle mangers in further education and find out whether these roles were changing as a result of incorporation. If so, the challenge would be to draw some conclusions from the research and develop issues for wider discussion and further consideration. The focus was on seeking a new angle on organisational development and trying to find possibilities that may not yet have received detailed attention, but which may be extremely useful to colleges as they seek to adapt to the new operating environment.

It was important to get close to managers to understand their thinking and uncover some basic assumptions about work within a college. In order to do this, and bring the issues into sharp focus, access was agreed with two colleges and their experiences were considered in depth.

The first college was Chesterfield College, a large broadly based city-centre college serving a significant area of North Derbyshire which has a wide range of

educational and training requirements. The second was Melton Mowbray College, a smaller more rural college situated in Leicestershire with a range of courses typical of most FE colleges and developing as a centre for performing arts. The college has responsibility for the town's theatre and leisure centre.

During January 1994 a total of 16 senior and middle managers took part in a series of semi-structured interviews. All managers were helpful and willing to talk about a range of organisational issues. These interviews were completed over a very short period of time to avoid managers discussing the questions amongst themselves. Managers were given little information about the research project so that responses could not be prepared in advance. A cross-section of long-serving and newly appointed managers of different ages, and from academic and support functions, were interviewed to give the research organisational balance.

It has been interesting to compare the comments of senior and middle managers and this has been one of the most revealing aspects of the research. There is a mixture of different perceptions, opinions and attitudes as managers observe what is happening around them and attempt to influence the future of their organisations, in a world where the only thing that is certain is the need to deliver consistently high quality services with less and less resources.

Management roles and responsibilities

Managers or not?

According to Gray (1991) 'The idea that most senior staff in schools and colleges are managers is a relatively recent one'. Until about 10 years ago it could be argued that the senior members of staff were regarded more as senior professionals than managers; senior teachers being seen by more junior staff as technical experts in their field. This is supported by Donnelly (1990) who had earlier suggested that in schools in the past, subject expertise was probably the most significant reason for appointment to a head of department post. Managing staff, for example, was regarded as the responsibility of the head teacher or principal.

The development of the management role was reinforced by the Education Reform Act 1988 and moves towards locally managed schools/colleges; and with incorporation came more responsibility for management.

There are many definitions of management. Mintzberg (1973) identified 10 roles for the manager:

- interpersonal roles: figurehead, leader, liaison;
- informational roles: monitor, disseminator, spokesman; and
- decisional roles: entrepreneur, disturbance handler, resource allocator, negotiator.

The mix of roles will vary in different organisations.

The work of managers

Managers at Chesterfield College and Melton Mowbray College were asked what activities took up most of their time. This was a subjective question and answers would be based on the individual's perception rather than measured data. Middle managers in both colleges emphasised the administration and organisational aspects of their jobs; these would feature within the informational roles as described by Mintzberg. It is possible that these activities had a higher profile because they were the least rewarding professionally, and some resentment was detected about the amount of day-to-day administration that was required by the organisation, although one middle manager did not see that the tasks could be delegated elsewhere.

The second most time-consuming aspect of the job was generally described by middle managers as 'trouble-shooting', 'chasing about' and 'fire fighting problems'. These activities could be regarded as being part of the third category outlined by Mintzberg – decisional roles – handling problems and resolving difficult situations so that things get done. This came over as a substantial part of the middle manager's job and received continued emphasis throughout the discussions.

These middle managers have responsibility for a large number of staff within the two colleges, and it is interesting to note that the interpersonal roles as described by Mintzberg were not really mentioned

at this stage. Perhaps these roles were more closely associated with senior managers, although it could be argued as Mintzberg does, that they are part of every manager's job.

When the same question was asked of senior managers at Chesterfield College the responses emphasised functional responsibility with, for example, the Director of Marketing spending most of his time on marketing-related matters and curriculum directors spending more time on curriculum issues. At Melton Mowbray College, similar responses were made by senior managers with reference to hands-on management tasks. These findings appear to show that management was very function-orientated.

It was interesting to explore with these managers what they personally felt was the most important aspect of their job. This was done to see whether managers emphasised different aspects of their jobs and whether there were any differences between what was important and what they spent most of their time doing.

The emphasis at middle management level in both organisations was on delivery, students, staff management, issues of curriculum development, quality and course provision. There was recognition of the need to attract more students and business development was continually mentioned as being important. One middle manager talked about the importance of effective communication with staff, and another spoke of the importance of building effective staff relationships in order to achieve the objectives of that particular department. It is worth noting that the emphasis at middle management level in the two organisations was understandably departmental activity. These people were the 'doers' and the 'organisers'.

With senior managers, it was suspected that there would be a more strategic emphasis to their comments. At Chesterfield College each senior manager identified the most important aspect of his or her job in a functional capacity. For instance, the Director of Personnel discussed effective personnel management, the curriculum directors talked about curriculum issues, and the Chief Administration Officer emphasised his work with the corporation. The Director of Strategic Planning did discuss the overall strategic direction of the college, he had been responsible for co-ordinating the strategic plan. A wider discussion on the overall mission had been expected followed by, perhaps, a functional breakdown of responsibilities but this was not the case.

Senior managers tended to see the change brought about by incorporation in terms of more management freedoms, with no local authority influence, but with greater personal responsibility and accountability; although they were quickly realising that this so called freedom was tempered by, for example, the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) funding mechanisms and other requirements.

The colleges were free from local political influence, and this was viewed as a positive development as they were now important in their own right and not part of a wider political scene. To a large extent the issues for senior managers centred on total resource management – getting the best out of the resources available to them.

Middle managers were very much aware of new commercial pressures at each college and commented on the financial considerations they were now having to give to their day-to-day activities. The impression at this stage was that some middle managers felt constrained by the outcomes of incorporation, whereas senior managers appeared to see it as a time of greater opportunity for the college.

Different perceptions?

It was important to find out how the role of a senior manager was perceived within the college. Middle managers were asked to explain their perception of the senior management role within their college. In both colleges, the emphasis was on corporate decision-making, establishing strategic shape and direction, integrating functions and forward planning. At this point, it should be noted that middle managers saw the key role for senior managers as concentrating on strategic matters, whatever they may be.

Earlier findings revealed that senior managers saw the most important aspect of their work to be functional activity. It is arguable whether the formation of the strategic plan from a series of objectives to be delivered by senior managers could constitute strategic direction for each area of management responsibility.

Peter Drucker (1973) suggested areas of management that required clear objectives; i.e. marketing, innovation, human organisation, financial resources, productivity, social responsibility and profit requirements. This 'management by objectives' approach has been a key feature of Drucker's writing on management and this is influenced by Drucker's obsession with the bottom-line, an understandable measurement to take in business terms.

Drucker thinks that corporate goals should be set and divided into clear objectives and assigned to different groups or individuals within the organisation. This model of management is apparent in both colleges, but particularly at Chesterfield College where there was specific emphasis on co-ordinating functional objectives.

Having discussed with staff the role of senior management, the next area of study was the current perception of the middle manager within the college. Again, there was a consistency in the views expressed by senior managers in the two colleges. Middle managers were seen primarily as 'doers', those who operationalise policy decisions, carry out day-to-day activities and have a largely maintenance role within the organisation.

Middle managers appeared to view their own role in a similar way and talked about deployment of resources, implementation of policy and acting as problem solver, 'blotting paper' and 'shock absorber', dealing with the problems and concerns of staff, the issues of concern to senior managers and making some sense in between.

One important matter which did arise was the issue of where the loyalties of middle managers rested – with their staff or with the management team? Middle managers thought their role was a complex one which many senior managers would not envy – a view supported by some senior managers.

It was fascinating to learn that a number of the middle managers interviewed disliked the term 'middle management'. The term implied bureaucracy, processing and lower management status. This perception has been supported by coverage of major organisations 'delayering' since the recession. There may be an identity issue for some middle managers – whether they are part of the management team or whether they are more aligned to their working groups. Senior managers will need to persuade these key people that they are very much part of the management within the college, and that they have a key role to play as the college develops, if they are to get the best out of these people and their staff groups.

Changing management roles

After examining the different perceptions of senior and middle management within the two colleges, it was helpful to explore whether these roles had changed since incorporation in April 1993. There was a lengthy build-up to incorporation on 1 April 1993, and many developments, e.g. restructuring in both colleges, took place prior to vesting day. Somewhat surprisingly, at Chesterfield College, the collective view of senior managers was that nothing had really changed as a result of incorporation. The role of the senior management had apparently remained the same, but with, perhaps, more emphasis on forward planning. The terms 'forward planning' and 'strategic planning' became interchangeable. Greater strategic awareness was required with longer planning horizons than previously necessary under the LEA. But, what about the people issues? If management is viewed in terms of management by objectives (Drucker) – pure functional management – then the shape of the senior management role may not have changed significantly.

At Melton Mowbray College there was a recognition of some change; providing a more coherent framework on which to base the allocation of resources and to develop the curriculum. There was also a realisation of the importance that people play in achieving the strategic objectives of the college, and that this had become a bigger issue since incorporation. The college was now the employer and could therefore shape its own employment policies and style of management, unrestricted by the local authority. There appeared to be some differences in thinking emerging between the hard issues at Chesterfield College and the softer people issues at Melton Mowbray College.

Middle managers recognised incorporation as a time of greater corporate responsibility, giving senior managers more responsibility for planning and monitoring performance and greater accountability for the overall performance of the college. This view was shared at Melton Mowbray College, where they felt that senior managers must have a focus on resource management issues, more so than prior to incorporation, but overall, managers' thoughts tended

to reflect functional concerns and generally hard issues, such as strategy, planning and financial controls.

Had the role of middle manager changed with incorporation? After all, the fundamental business of the organisation remained the same as before, and therefore change was not inevitable. Senior managers at Chesterfield College said that the role of middle managers in their college now had changed; they were more involved in planning, had greater freedom and more responsibilities for their own work and the work of their groups.

More was expected of middle managers, and according to senior managers this was a time of great opportunity for their middle management colleagues.

At Chesterfield College, the middle managers recognised greater accountability, more autonomy and freedom to pursue their own developments. The college had employed specialists in marketing, personnel and finance, and whilst middle managers had more freedom to do what they thought was best for their particular departments, they had the benefit of in-house professional advice to assist them.

The implications of resource management are now being faced by middle managers at Melton Mowbray College, as mentioned by the senior managers. There was a recognition of the key role that middle managers have in the management of people within the organisation.

The middle managers felt better informed about developments within the college, but did not talk about more autonomy, greater freedom or flexibility. The issue of accountability was mentioned and it was interesting that one middle manager used the word 'blame' as opposed to accountability.

It was also discussed that, whilst middle managers may be allocated new responsibilities, it was felt that the professional skills of others (for example, in marketing) were required to help them with major initiatives such as increasing participation rates. This appears to be a major issue for some at Melton Mowbray College and it is interesting that this was not the case at Chesterfield College, perhaps because they had employed professionals in this area. Chesterfield College is a relatively large college and more able to buy in these specialist and expensive skills. This luxury is not afforded to smaller organisations like Melton Mowbray College, and this in itself is causing concern with some middle managers.

Have the senior and middle management roles really changed that much with incorporation? A structure was needed in which to consider the data collected and the McKinsey seven 's' framework helped to analyse the developments so far. The framework was developed by Peters, Waterman, Pascale and Athos during the early 1980s whilst they worked for the McKinsey consulting organisation and a copy is provided as Appendix 1.

McKinsey seven 's' framework

The McKinsey team argued that in order for an organisation to be successful there were seven features of management activity that needed to form part of a coherent framework to take the organisation forward. The first three elements of this framework are *strategy*, *structure* and *systems* (known as the 'cold triangle').

Each college now has a strategic plan based on FEFC guidelines. The organisational structures in place at the two colleges have both been reviewed in the light of incorporation, and in the case of Chesterfield College, they have been able to buy in new specialist skills in finance, marketing and personnel to help them adapt to their new operating environment. Melton Mowbray College has slimmed down the management team and clarified senior management roles, but recruited only one further member of staff, a finance expert. Both colleges have spent time improving their management information systems.

This was particularly apparent from the conversations with middle managers who stated that they are required to provide more and more information for monitoring purposes since incorporation.

The other four features of the McKinsey seven 's' framework are the softer issues (known as the 'warm square') and are:

- *staff*: the type of person who is required to work within the new organisation;
- *style*: the way that things will be carried out within the new organisation;
- *shared values*: the set of beliefs and principles which will characterise the new organisation;

- *skills*: the distinctive and essential competences required by the new organisation and its people.

The soft issues tend to be much more difficult to change because they are so closely linked to the attitudes and behaviour of people. However, Peters *et al.* argue that all these features are interconnected; whilst the strategy, structure and systems within an organisation can be changed fairly quickly, the other softer features take more time to change. Short-term demands have been set by the FEFC and therefore it is not surprising that the hard features within the framework are addressed as a matter of priority, but, when the longer term prosperity of the college is considered, attention must be given to the soft issues if the organisation is to be successful. Many colleges could demonstrate that they had addressed issues connected with strategy, organisational structure and systems. However, staff have repeatedly been taking or considering industrial action, so something is not right somewhere.

The challenge, therefore, is for senior managers to articulate the beliefs and values of the new organisation; ensure that the right kind of people are working there; that the organisation develops the new skills required and that all this is happening within a coherent framework.

What next?

Colleges are aiming to increase participation rates in further education and there is evidence that they are seeking to do this by making themselves more attractive, through improving their market image to the whole community, and providing more flexible routes of access to their services. They will, however, need to become more innovative and entrepreneurial than ever before in order to raise the educational aspirations of the community and meet the subsequent needs in a flexible and responsive way. Entrepreneurial means showing initiative and taking calculated risks to achieve greater profits, all supported by innovative approaches to work, trying new things, generating ideas, and welcoming change.

Judith Round, President of the Association of College Managers recognised that managers are being invited (by the Government) to be 'entrepreneurial, original and business-like'. Charles Handy (1992) explained that 'one organisation once circulated all its managers with a statement saying that with effect from a certain date they had resolved to become an entrepreneurial organisation'. To the surprise of senior management nothing changed! To change staff behaviour is a major task and one not to be underestimated. To do this successfully senior managers must move on from functional management and address the wider issues of organisational development. The management of further education is changing.

A process of change

There is clearly some change taking place in the role of management, and particularly middle management, and so the next step was to examine the change process in more detail. Behavioural changes happen as a result of many different influences. Cultivating the right conditions for change is important and likely to be more successful in the longer term than driving through short-term initiatives with unresponsive employees.

Colleges are now required to become marketing organisations. There is clear intent through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 to expose FE colleges to market forces and as Levitt (1960) once suggested, 'marketing is the key to successful business management'. Peters and Waterman (1982) reinforced the need to get close to, and stay close to, customers. Colleges must get close to their direct customers (school-leavers, parents, mature students, local employers, etc.) and by raising educational aspirations and awareness, and satisfying customers they will develop and prosper as organisations and achieve the growth targets set by the Further Education Funding Council.

The McKinsey seven 's' framework has been helpful in analysing the research findings and although work has taken place in the areas of strategy, structure and systems, there has been little evidence to support activity in areas of staff, skills, style and shared values within the two organisations studied.

People, opinions and change

Handy (1993) describes organisations as 'communities of people' and suggests that they behave like other communities. 'They compete amongst themselves for power and resources, there are differences of opinion and of values, conflicts of priorities and of goals.' The challenge for the manager, as Handy goes on to explain, 'is to harness

the energy and thrust of the differences so that the organisation does not disintegrate but develops'. To do this, managers will need to create an environment that encourages innovation, entreprenurialism and flexibility.

New flexible contracts are gradually being introduced and this will move some way towards changing the working patterns of managers and staff. This should be regarded as a step in the right direction although we all know that change in attitudes and behaviour cannot be achieved overnight.

Colleges have been set the task of increasing participation in FE, with funding implications for not doing so. So, they must become 'growth organisations', moving forward on a rising tide of new ideas and a sound creativity-orientated management. It is accepted that new is not necessarily better so there should be a strong sense of continuous improvement for the benefit of the customer. Strategic leadership is essential to the 'growth organisation' and creating the environment for new ideas and constant innovation is a critical issue for senior managers as the organisations seek ways to develop and grow.

Bower spent many years helping leading companies to effect change in most industries in the United States, United Kingdom and Europe. He wrote, 'In every organisation, most people conceive new ideas worth fashioning into innovations. But most of these ideas are never born. Of the new ideas that are born, most die soon after birth. And of the ideas that live, most are trampled to death at infancy or fail to achieve sufficient maturity to carry through into effective innovation.'

Bower went on to suggest that there are four primary reasons why ideas are not born or die almost at birth:

- inertia (lack of time, interest or initiative);
- fear of criticism;
- lack of support for examining new ideas; or
- lack of early attention.

Although comfortable with Bower's comments so far, he later proposed that one of the ways to improve innovation was to separate planning from day-to-day activities. He said, 'The person who is immersed in day-to-day operations does not have time for getting, nurturing or sponsoring ideas, nor for seeing them through to maturity.' This view does not sit comfortably within the new operating environment of further education colleges and it illustrates the changes in business practice since Bower's arguments were developed in the 1960s. Staff and middle managers are closer to the customer than anyone else in the organisation and they must accept the responsibility for generating new ideas, for continuously improving, for developing new business and opening up new markets. Increased competition and the need to survive will encourage innovation in management more so than the 'feather-bedded environment' of the local authority, as described by one of the managers in the study.

Achieving these things requires a role change for managers and so role definition becomes important. In this study the role of senior managers has been perceived as providing direction for the organisation, and the middle managers as the 'doers', operationalising the policies and procedures of the organisation. This is a rather open statement and more precision is needed on the clear-cut contributions to the organisation. During the on-site discussions the question was asked 'How do middle managers help the college to achieve its strategic aims?'

The senior people explained that middle managers had a responsibility for achieving their proportion of the objectives (management by objectives again), for recruiting students, and generally making things happen to agreed patterns/targets. Middle managers reinforced this role and talked about responsibilities for recruiting and retaining students, achieving targets and maintaining service provision with emphasis on quality. This is fine, but earlier work has indicated that middle managers had potentially a much bigger influence on the organisation than they presently exert.

More from managers

The middle manager role is already a complex one, but there is a need to add further responsibilities in the interests of the long-term development of the college. The new middle manager must be an innovator, an entrepreneur and an ideas person. Working closely with staff and customers they have a critical role in gathering market intelligence and in thinking pro-actively about how the college can raise market awareness and meet the needs of the community.

The new responsibilities for middle managers are great and rightly placed at this level. Not only will these managers be charged with carrying out the existing provision to exceptionally high quality standards, they must also seek out new opportunities and develop teams that can deliver these new flexible programmes to achieve greater participation and provide added value for the customer.

Middle managers can no longer be seen as merely organisers and doers; they must be catalysts of change, people with ideas who are coming forward with new approaches as a result of their close connections with the customer. This role may not sit comfortably with some middle managers and attention must be given to the issue of role incompatibility.

Senior managers will be responsible for creating a climate of innovation, entrepreneurialism and flexibility in which the new middle manager can prosper. Before going any further, it will be helpful to assess what it is that middle managers really want from their jobs. The question was first put to senior managers at both colleges and the responses included: a sense of improving the curriculum; having 'good' relationships with staff; autonomy; professional satisfaction; assisting student performance; and an overall feeling of achievement. It was a common view that middle managers wanted something more than was available within a regular teaching role, bearing in mind that not all managers are teaching staff.

For those middle managers with teaching responsibilities the motivating factors were mainly student-orientated, related to maintaining/increasing numbers, student progression, student achievements and overall student satisfaction with the college. Also mentioned was working with an enthusiastic team.

These answers suggest that these middle managers feel very close to the teaching of students within their departments. A strong connection with the customers was expected, and this is critical because the market reputation of the department will, to a large extent, rest on the achievements of students (past and present).

What is not so evident is any mention of generating new ideas, attracting new business and improving the organisation as a whole. The middle manager must keep his or her obsession with quality and the customer but must widen his or her perspective to other business issues which will be so important to the college in the future.

This new role demands different skills and at Chesterfield College there was evidence of management training concerned with topics such as strategic planning, financial planning and marketing. At Melton Mowbray College there is a development programme which is helping middle managers to develop new skills in areas of people management.

These are both good staff development programmes – but how do you encourage employees to take a more innovative approach to work? Senior managers must create an environment in which innovation is encouraged and can prosper. As this develops, role incompatibility will be a real issue for some and this can be discussed within the concept of a psychological contract.

Psychological shift

The idea that a psychological contract exists was originally popularised by Schein (1980) while Handy (1993) later explained that, 'the psychological contract is essentially a set of expectations. We have a set of results that we expect from the organisation, results that satisfy certain needs and in return for which we will expend some of our energies and talents. Similarly, the organisation has its set of expectations and its list of payments or outcomes that it will give to us.'

The expectations of the employer and the employee can be very different and, Handy would argue, it is only when they are similar that the maximum motivation of the individual will occur. A calculative contract is a voluntary one and there is usually an exchange of money for services provided. Handy remarks that many people would go on working if they did not need the money and, it therefore follows that many people get something out of work other than basic financial reward. If the organisation seeks to get more out of the contract than the employee wishes to give, the psychological contract moves into a more coercive form.

In persuading managers to change, a coercive contract would be in place if there were penalties for those who did not accept the change psychologically. This is arguably not the way to encourage co-operative working, and will surely lead to a

resentment of change and isolation. The refusal to accept changing circumstances may be a symptom of other underlying troubles.

The challenge for senior managers is to change employees' attitudes and behaviour within a co-operative psychological contract. This is where employees identify with the aims of the organisation and see those aims as being close to their own individual aspirations. One way of helping to achieve this is to give middle managers more input into planning and corporate decision-making to reinforce the fact that they are a key part of the management process. Senior management, in turn, loosen their control on day-to-day activities and these become the real responsibility of middle managers.

This whole process is built on trust; senior managers comfortable that middle managers have the necessary skills, experience and creativity to handle these issues for themselves. Senior managers, whilst being functional specialists, must turn their attention to matters of wider strategic importance. The issues that require attention are those contained in the McKinsey 'warm square' i.e. style, staff, skills and shared values.

Organisational values have to be meaningful to individuals and it follows that employees must care about the future of the organisation. It is not possible to impose a psychological contract without it becoming coercive. So, as freedom of entry into the psychological contract is important, the persuading and influencing skills of senior, and later middle, managers become critical. Handy (1993) explained what he meant by the term 'psychological success'; it is experienced by people when 'they have set a challenging goal for themselves, they determine their own methods of achieving that goal and the goal is relevant to their self-concept'. The notion being that achievement of the goal adds to a sense of competence and greater self-worth, which in turn encourages the exploration of new ideas and the tackling of bigger issues.

The power of persuasion

Senior managers must persuade middle managers that what they have achieved in the past is very relevant to today's requirements, but that there is an overwhelming need to build on those skills and develop a more innovative approach to work to ensure the future success of the college. More freedom and flexibility is creeping into middle management jobs and this is a positive development in encouraging a more innovative environment, but it is only the beginning.

The approach of two different colleges

A strategic focus

Emphasis has been given to developing shared values and the importance of organisational togetherness; the 'we' feeling. Is there, however, a consistency between managers when discussing strategic aims? Senior managers and middle managers at both colleges were asked to explain the strategic aims of their college.

At Chesterfield College it was clear that the aims were to meet the needs of the community in the widest sense and to increase participation by raising the aspirations of the population. They intended to be consumer-led rather than product-orientated, bearing in mind the difficulty of being customer-led if the potential customers do not immediately identify with your product. In a sense it is for the college to lead the customer – both employers and potential students – in order to raise participation.

The middle managers shared the community focus and talked in slightly more depth about issues concerning the quality of provision. Chesterfield College has a large catchment area with a low participation rate in further/higher education compared with other parts of the country. A senior manager attributed this to the relatively low educational aspirations of the people who lived locally, and a corporate aim is to raise awareness of the benefits of further education by investing more resources in marketing to attract people who are unemployed, recently redundant or women returners.

The response at Melton Mowbray College showed that senior managers were concerned with survival, first and foremost, and continuous development. The college is situated in a relatively rural area with good participation rates; over half the students are over the age of 19 and this shows how successful the college has been in appealing to the wider community. This has happened in no small part due to the work of the current management team over recent years. However, the FEFC requires colleges to achieve growth and therefore Melton Mowbray

College must increase student numbers in a community which may be closer to saturation point than other areas around the country. Senior managers had been to an exhibition in Hong Kong in an attempt to encourage foreign students to enrol at the college.

Middle managers at Melton Mowbray College were aware of the need for growth but were concerned about business survival as their first priority, as opposed to Chesterfield College where middle managers continually spoke of quality and customer needs. These comments do have a degree of consistency on the basis that maintaining quality and meeting customer needs contribute to ensuring survival.

However, as Chesterfield has a low participation rate in FE and the college has made a significant investment in marketing there is not a 'nail-biting' concern for survival, whereas at Melton Mowbray College the issue of survival was clearly emphasised in my discussions with managers. What does this mean for college management generally?

Chesterfield College has made new appointments in finance, personnel, marketing, premises and health and safety, and there are now plans to move into higher education, an area in which there will be little competition locally. The lack of competition is perhaps not surprising bearing in mind the level of interest in further education. Strategic decisions to move into higher education against this background require careful analysis, which has taken place.

Middle managers at Chesterfield College are charged with the explicit responsibility of recruiting more students. They are supported in this activity by a Director of Marketing and his team. Chesterfield is a geographical area targeted for development and the college attracts European funding for some educational initiatives. Within the present environment, managers feel that there is clear potential within Chesterfield to increase the participation rates in post-16 education, and this is consistent with local market intelligence.

Melton Mowbray College is a different matter. As it is a relatively small college in an already highly penetrated market, there is greater emphasis on examining new opportunities for business growth. Managers are looking at foreign markets and also aiming to develop their performing arts faculty into a centre of excellence, utilising the facilities of Melton Mowbray Theatre which is directly managed by the college.

Melton Mowbray College needs to look at the community to see what further services it can offer to markets other than traditional education. Expanding the short course services and other consultancy options are clearly very attractive, and using the theatre and performing arts lecturers in a more innovative way, perhaps for management development purposes, is clearly an issue for the future. This goes to show that in some cases the smaller the college, the more innovative it must be in order to survive and prosper.

What are the issues for management development in this new environment? In Melton Mowbray College they do not currently have the marketing and human resource management specialists available to Chesterfield College. However, in both colleges middle managers will have an increasingly strong role in marketing and staff management. Senior management must support middle managers as they seek to develop new skills.

For an organisation to be successful, the McKinsey team identified the importance of shared values or superordinate goals within the seven 's' Framework. Consistency within management on these matters is helpful in taking the organisation forward, although there may well be conflict over practical issues and business decisions.

Strategic planning

Both colleges have a written strategic plan and of course this is a requirement of the FEFC. While the framework is prescribed by the FEFC, the method of developing the plan is down to each individual college.

At Chesterfield College the planning process was led by senior managers, but middle managers were involved in agreeing the number of students they thought could be attracted to their programmes.

The market research input was formalised and integrated into the planning process. There was limited input from others, and although middle managers felt they had been consulted the planning process was generally seen as the responsibility of the senior management team. It is understood that the pressures to develop the first strategic plan for

Chesterfield College meant that middle managers were not involved as much as some senior managers would have liked.

Melton Mowbray College's strategic plan was primarily developed by senior managers, but again middle managers were asked to identify development areas and projected student numbers. At this college, emphasis was given to the on-going discussions between senior and middle managers over curriculum issues on a strategic level. A similar approach was being followed by both colleges. Plans were being reviewed throughout the year on a progress reporting level. The overall strategic direction of the colleges was not challenged, unlike in some sixth form colleges where there is an open debate about the merits of pursuing more vocational courses.

When discussing strategic planning, the comments of Sir Ralph Halpern (Polan 1984) come to mind. He once said, 'Most British management is about thinking of the past, trying variations of what worked in the past, or just regretting better days. I think about the future.' Senior managers in further education are encouraged to develop a clear vision of the future and overcome problems within the organisation that stand in the way of this being achieved.

When senior managers at Chesterfield College were asked about progress against the strategic plan they discussed growth targets and, in particular, their achievements in some functional areas. At Melton Mowbray College there was a similar response. When the same question was asked of middle managers their response was generally vague; phrases like 'looking reasonably good'; 'think we've met the target'; and 'reasonably well off I think' were commonplace, although one middle manager did say that he was more informed of developments since incorporation. This comment was echoed by others.

At this point, we must remember that middle managers had identified that their jobs had become more administrative since incorporation, with reference to the generation of more data for senior managers and yet on issues of corporate performance, as opposed to departmental performance, there was a vague response in many cases. Communicating to staff that things are happening and developments are taking place will re-enforce progress, so long as this is tempered with reports of problems, to reflect the reality of organisational life.

The operating environment of Melton Mowbray College may mean that the pace of change, in terms of changing attitudes to work, will need to be quicker and more focused than at Chesterfield College. This indicates that each college must assess and adapt to its own external environment. However, does this mean the larger and more affluent colleges that we may have thought would lead the process of change are in fact in a slightly protected position? This is possible, particularly where a large college faces limited competition in an area of relatively low participation in FE. The need for change is likely to be more urgent in those smaller organisations.

Conclusion

This study set out to consider the extent to which incorporation had impacted on the management of FE colleges. There were significant changes in the funding arrangements with new targets being set for growth, and a strong focus on strategic planning, reinforced by the FEFC's requirement for a strategic plan from each FE college.

The day-to-day management responsibilities of FE colleges may not have changed significantly according to most of the managers in the study. The fundamental business of the college remains the same. Senior managers have more responsibility for strategy, and there is now perhaps a greater recognition by senior managers of the management role that could be performed by middle managers in the organisation.

A strong framework was needed to shape the research analysis and the McKinsey seven 's' framework proved to be particularly useful for this purpose. Athos (Pascale and Athos 1982), a member of the McKinsey team that designed the framework, said, 'a strategy has to be one for which the systems are in place and which the organisation's structure is capable of delivering. Staff must be capable of working the strategy through and must have the skills to learn through it and from it. This, in turn, will require the appropriate management style. The whole is orchestrated by superordinate goals (shared values) to which all employees commit themselves, often using spontaneously improvised means of realising

these. This totality constitutes the organisation's culture, a pattern which is more or less harmonious.' This highlights the relationship between organisational culture and business performance.

Organisational culture

During this research and subsequent analysis one critical area of change emerged; senior managers are now responsible for understanding and shaping the organisational culture. Schein (1980) described culture as 'a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems'. Issues of 'external adaptation and internal integration' are very relevant to FE.

Athos referred to potential tension between what is termed the 'cold triangle' – strategy, structure and systems, and the 'warm square', made up of shared values, staff, style and skills. The two colleges have spent time and energy in the areas of strategy, structure and systems and although these may be in place, there are other issues, more closely associated with the warm square that colleges need to pay attention to in order to prepare for future challenges.

Middle managers have a critical role in this process. This is the age of the new middle manager; the middle manager as an innovator and entrepreneur. They must be fully involved in business planning and reassured that they are a key part of the management decision-making process within the college.

By encouraging a closer association with senior management this group of people can become the catalysts of change within the body of staff as a whole. Senior management must provide clear strategic leadership and integrate the features of the McKinsey seven 's' framework. The new values within the organisation should be emphasised at every opportunity and this is one of the tasks for managers of the future.

Bennis (Bennis and Nanus 1985) reinforced the importance of the organisation having vision and communicating it in a way that it became shared by all employees within the organisation. That vision must be the glue that binds together the whole of the workforce and when you look at the issues in this way it becomes clear that attending to strategy, structures and systems (the hard issues) is very necessary, but not everything.

It has been stressed that managers at all levels should begin to adopt a more innovative and entrepreneurial attitude to their work and for this message to register with all staff within the college it is important that the organisation develops what Terence Deal (1988) calls 'symbolic managers', organisational heroes with the spark and imagination that is needed to carry the college forward. The organisation can be seen to value these new attributes and provide role models for other members of staff.

There was a somewhat negative feeling to the term 'middle manager' by middle managers and this is the opportunity for them to demonstrate the critical contribution they can make to the success of the organisation. The management of ideas must become a key feature of the work of senior managers.

Thinking organisations

In another college a middle manager had complained of 'ideas fatigue'. This was mistakenly interpreted as the manager being overloaded with self-generated ideas for improving things and having difficulty persuading others to take notice. Not so. He was overloaded with the ideas of senior managers and felt that he was being asked to contribute to too many initiatives. With increased competition between schools, sixth form colleges and FE colleges, and performance funding, it is no longer possible for managers of this nature to be seen as the norm in further education. This will mean changing attitudes and behaviour of middle managers and it can only happen if colleges become 'thinking organisations', in terms of staff management and business development.

At Chesterfield College most of the managers have been working in a public sector/further education environment for the last 20 years. To a certain extent, these people have thought about issues of strategy, structure and systems for a long time, but more intensely of late as a result of incorporation.

What is now being suggested is that management should turn its attention to the 'warm square' contained in the McKinsey seven 's' framework. Why do we do things? How are they done? What

values do we hold within our new organisation? How might we project the new shape to management thinking in the most effective way for others to understand and make use of? Issues at the very heart of organisational culture; uncovering the underlying beliefs, values, and assumptions within the organisation.

With reference to the 'thinking organisation', Edward De Bono (1971) described the purpose of lateral thinking as 'the generation of new ideas and escape from old ones' – very relevant to the FE sector. De Bono was concerned with finding ways to break out of existing patterns and to look at new and old things in different ways. FE is not the same as some businesses where the company could produce the same product cheaper or quicker than rivals. So, creativity is clearly part of the new make up of further education management. De Bono's views of the new 'concept manager' are relevant; he talks about managing the 'concept capital of an organisation', explaining this as creating new ideas, adapting to change and defining objectives.

This must be relevant to further education and certainly looks so from the findings of this research. No longer does a middle manager remain a 'doer', s/he becomes a 'doer' and a 'thinker' at the same time.

It is for senior managers to create an environment that supports innovation, encouraging middle managers to talk with students, staff and employers on a regular basis to raise awareness and discuss ways in which the college can help. Management development priorities are therefore in the areas of sales, marketing and managing customer relations. The ability of these people to project the college as a progressive customer-focused organisation will be a critical factor in the future.

Senge (1990) has written about the 'thinking manager'. He says that when a manager in a Japanese firm sits quietly, generally no one comes to interrupt; it is acknowledged that he is thinking, and when he moves around the office his colleagues feel that it is the right time to disturb him. Senge argues that in the UK and America the opposite tends to happen. We normally assume that if a person is sitting quietly s/he is not doing anything, or that s/he is not doing anything very important. The middle managers in this study have been described as the 'doers' within the organisation and senior management are now strongly encouraged to add responsibility for strategic thinking to their work. The organisation can then move forward into the next phase of its development with confidence and real commitment to continuous improvement.

The constraints of functionalism

Colleges must not look at the past and try to manipulate that to become successful in the future. The challenge, based on these research findings, is to release managers from the constraints of functionalism; to open up the strategic dimension of each manager's work, and encourage new ideas about the future. There will be some managers who relish this role and others who may find it difficult to come to terms with. One middle manager at Chesterfield College showed very clearly that he was thinking about the long-term well-being of the organisation. He discussed the importance of attracting part-time students to the college to meet the growth targets. In his particular area of the curriculum he could probably generate more part-time students than any other area of the college. By focusing on part-time recruitment in his subjects he would help the achievement of the growth targets set by the Further Education Funding Council and leave his colleagues to attract full-time students, which were more easily attracted because of the nature of their different courses.

This person was thinking strategically and creatively and it is hoped that he becomes a 'symbolic manager' of the future. If that is the case the FE sector has much to look forward to over the coming years. It will be those colleges that adapt to the new way of working that will progress and develop as the move to rationalise the sector gathers momentum.

Being culture conscious

From the findings of this research project it is suggested that the colleges who move to assess cultural strengths and weaknesses, and who take subsequent action through coherent HR strategies, will be the ones that continue to go forward and develop as commercial organisations. The hard business issues and softer people issues are inter-related and addressing one without the other will lead to organisational paralysis in the longer term.

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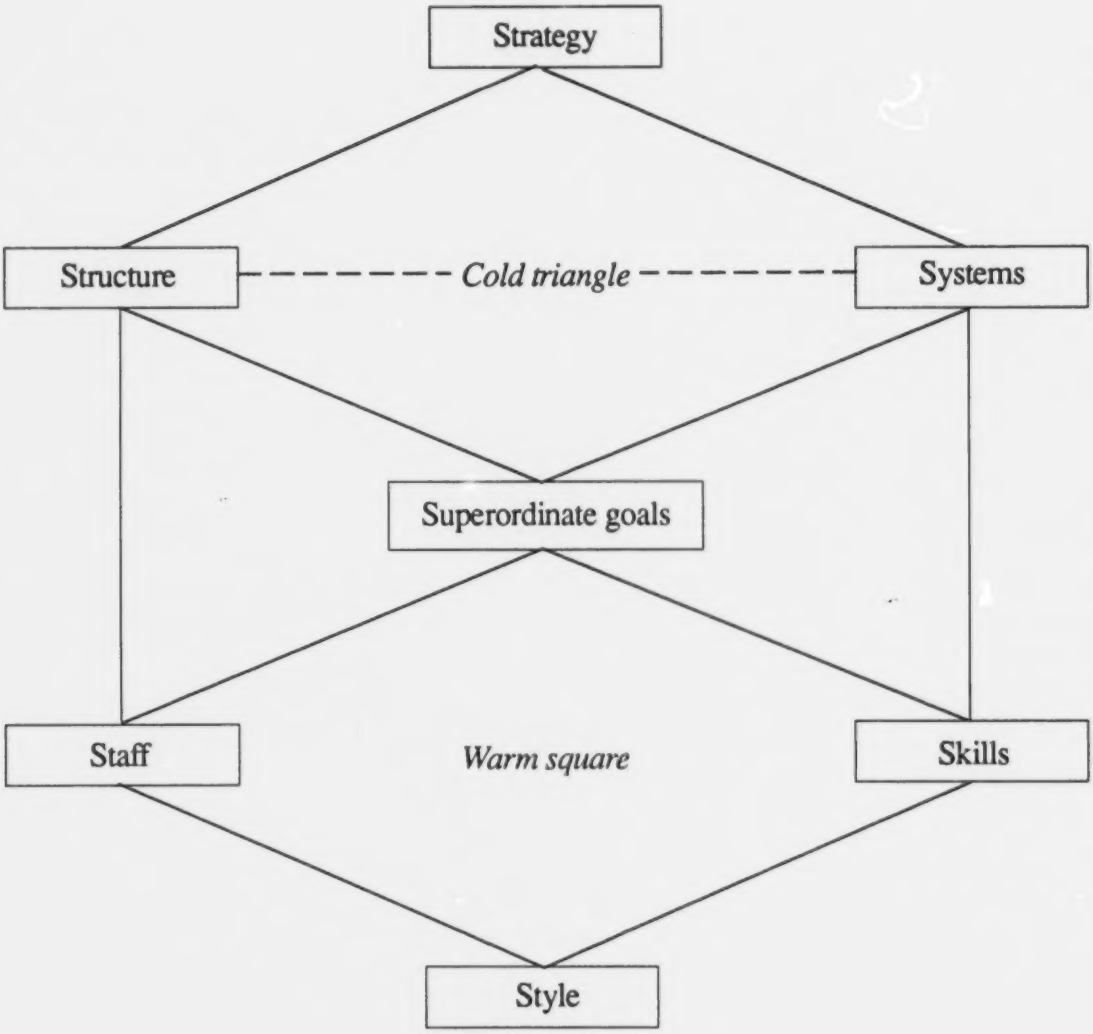
Appendix 1: The McKinsey seven 'S' framework



Source: Peters, Waterman, Pascale and Athos (1982)

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